

“These Savages live in Wigwams, of Cabins built of Bark, which are made round like an Oven, to prevent any Damage by hard Gales of Wind. They make the Fire in the middle of the House, and have a Hole at the Top of the Roof right above the Fire, to let out the smoke. These Dwellings are as hot as Stoves, where the Indians sleep and sweat all Night. The Floors thereof are never paved nor swept, so that they have always loose Earth on them...”

“The Bark they make their Cabins withal, is generally Cyprus, or red or white Cedar; and sometimes, when they are a great way from any of these Woods, they make use of Pine-Bark, which is the worser sort. In building these Fabricks, they get very long Poles, of Pine, Cedar, Hiccory, or any Wood that will bend; these are the Thickness of the Small of a Man’s Leg, at the thickest end, which they generally strip of Bark, and warm them well in the Fire, which makes them tough and fit to bend; afterwards, they stick the thickest ends of them in the Ground, about two Yards asunder, in a Circular form, the distance they design the Cabin to be, (which is not always round, but sometimes oval) then they bend the Tops and bring them together, and bind the ends with Bark of Trees, that is proper for that use, as Elm is, or sometimes the Moss that grows on the Trees, and is a Yard or two long, and never rots; then they brace them with other Poles, to make them strong; afterwards, cover them all over with Bark, so that they are very warm and tight, and will keep them firm against all the Weathers that blow.”

As the 18th century approached, a greater number and variety of European trade items entered Saura culture. However, it seems that the Sauras found ways to incorporate this new technology into existing traditions by either substituting or intermingling the new with the old. For example, metal tools sometimes replaced stone, but traditional farming and hunting methods continued; glass beads supplemented those made from shell, but only to enhance a preexisting skill; and introduced fruits offered additional variety, but never became food staples.

Although it appears that the Sauras were able to work such trade items into existing patterns of subsistence, they were not able to adapt to the diseases introduced into the New World by early explorers. A lack of natural immunity for diseases like smallpox and measles resulted in devastating epidemics which swept through Native American tribes, killing scores of individuals.

Several late Sauratown sites show evidence of epidemics by revealing an unnatural proportion of grave sites, including the Stokes County site which likely served as the final home of the Sauras in the Dan River Valley. The burial sites here exhibit a departure from tradition by revealing shallow graves with little attention to detail. Prior to this epidemic the Sauras took great care in burying their dead by following well-established practices from one burial to the next. When considering this change in such an important tradition, it seems natural to infer that Saura society was under a great deal of stress during this time period.